The Adventure of a Prodigal Father

F. H. Cheley

The Adventure of a Prodigal Father

F. H. CHELEY

Author of "Told by the Camp Fire," "Camp and Outing Activities," etc.

Association Press
NEW YORK: 124 EAST 28TH STREET
LONDON: 47 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
1916

CONTENTS

I

HE IS URGED TO INVESTIGATE

I

HE IS URGED TO INVESTIGATE

Mr. Wentwerp's brow was perceptibly clouded as he passed from the Club dining room toward the elevator door. He had just come from a luncheon conference, where he had picked up several bits of information that had set him thinking profoundly. Twice he had pushed the "down" button and the elevator had passed him by. He turned now, a little impatiently, to try again, when, oddly enough, his eye caught a side glimpse of the face that was in his mind at that very moment.

"By Jove! That's Taylor now!" he said half aloud. "I must speak to him at once." He turned abruptly from the elevator and started in the direction of the large green rocker

that held one of the community's highly respected and influential business men. As he drew nearer, the sound of every step absorbed by the thick green rug, his eyes on the clean-cut, kindly face before him, he was keenly conscious of a sudden, strange, indefinable change in the man. There were many more grey hairs; the usual alertness of bearing, the unconscious power, were in some way changed. His manner almost bespoke dejection, for he was evidently completely absorbed in his own thoughts. He sat motionless, a far-away, dreamy look in his eyes.

Mr. John G. Taylor was generally considered to be one of the great business leaders of his day, and had always been Mr. Wentwerp's ideal of a modern, progressive, fair-minded man. Just why he should be packing up and leaving a prosperous business, a great circle of devoted friends, and an influence that was many

another man's envy, Wentwerp could not comprehend. Surely some very unusual circumstance must have suddenly entered into his arena.

"Well, John, it seems strange to see so busy a man as yourself wasting time here in a big easy chair," said Wentwerp, smilingly, as he extended his hand to his now fully alert friend. "What's this strange story I heard at lunch today about your leaving the city permanently the first of the week? What can have happened, John?" he added more confidentially, as he noted the sad eyes and the nervous twitching of the corners of a usually set and positive mouth. "Surely this bad financial year hasn't embarrassed you. Can it be that this awful war has affected your exports? Why, it was only three months ago, John, that you told me your future had never been brighter."

The two men stood looking into

each other's faces, their hands still clasped in the grip of friendship, each man by his bearing and dress typifying culture, personal efficiency, and modern progress.

"It never *was* brighter, Lawson, so far as business goes. I made a cool five thousand last month. But, man, in spite of that, I'm all broken up. I've grown old in a few weeks. I have made a startling discovery, and it has nearly finished me. I'm a bankrupt, sir," he said bitterly, "not in finances, but in the things that are of far more consequence. I've——"

"Can it be possible that there are troubles at home, John?" said Wentwerp, as he gently pushed his friend back into the chair, then pulled close another, in which he seated himself.

"No, thank God!" said Mr. Taylor hurriedly. "At least not with the wife, if that is what you mean. She is just the same, Wentwerp—

the very best in all creation; and it is because she suffers now that it is so hard for me to bear."

"Tell me about it, John. Isn't there some way I can help a little? You know, old man, all I have is at your——"

"No, Wentwerp, not even you can help this time. I must pay the price all myself. If it were only money, I could raise a million before night. But in my present distress I am helpless, defeated. Wentwerp, *it is my boy.*" Then, with a sudden flash he added, "Perhaps I can help you, instead of your lending me a hand."

"Help me!" said Wentwerp, at a loss to understand. "Why, I don't need help, old man. I don't understand you. Explain, won't you? I haven't the slightest idea what you——"

"Lawson, you have a son, haven't you, who is a young man now?" He

seemed not to have heard what Wentwerp had said. Wentwerp nodded assent, and waited.

"Well, listen to me. You had better divorce your business for a time and *study* that son. What he knows will simply astound you. You and I were born and brought up in the country—worked hard, slept well, and never had a dollar of our own till we went out for ourselves. Every blooming thing that seemed to be unbearable to us both, Lawson, in those days, turned out to be our very best friend. We came to the big city with the best equipment in the world for the struggle for success—health, strength, courage, and self-reliance which virtually amounted to independence. We prospered, you and I, then we married, and in due time each became the father of a son. Finally we were elected to this and that, and soon lost ourselves in business—swapping, yes, literally

swapping, the greatest thing that ever comes to any man for those things which we call influence and prosperity, but which, in their last analysis, are only a damnable veneer that deceives no one quite so completely as ourselves." He laughed a sad, empty little laugh, then, as he continued, every muscle became tense with feeling. It seemed as if he were musing aloud.

"John G. Taylor—president of so and so; member of this, that, and the other thing, and the father of a disreputable son!—O, not any more disreputable than thousands upon thousands of other men's sons in every big city in this fair land; not any more disreputable than many a lad that will marry into the best families of the commonwealth in the next few years; but, nevertheless, disreputable. 'John G. Taylor, a man of high personal efficiency and business acumen,' as the *Post* describes

me, but in reality, and I am just now discovering it, it is an extremely ill-proportioned efficiency that really amounts to a fatal lopsidedness.

"Lawson, listen to me: For fifteen years I have wrestled with competition. I have fought combines, shysters, and all sorts of grafting politicians. For fifteen years I have built and extended my great cantilever of influence and power, testing every beam that went into the structure, proving every tiny bolt, pin, and screw, while the world looked on and applauded. Magazines have featured my structure and minutely explained just what the influence of a life such as mine means to a city. Madly, blindly I have built on and on, with my heart, my soul, my time, striving to be a successful, modern citizen—seeing nothing, thinking of nothing but the consummation of my schemes; when suddenly, tragically, I see the very foundations settle away,

and the hopes and dreams for which I have paid such a tremendous price crash in a heap of waste and uselessness at my feet.

"I failed to remember the fundamental law of the cantilever, namely, that for every beam of out-reaching influence that I hoisted and added to my own life structure, I must add its exact equal in weight and development to the structure on the land—to the less spectacular side of my structure, if you please, at least as the world sees it—my family's life, and what they are in the community; not collectively, mind you, but as living individual units.

"Of course you remember Barnett Thursby. He was a close friend of mine. You recall he had two boys, both of whom went completely to the devil. It made a great impression on me as a young man, and I thought a great deal about it, determining that if ever I became the

father of sons I would not make the awful mistakes that that man did. I was always sorry for him, but at the same time down deep in my heart I felt that he failed because of his own lack of foresight, and that he had no one to blame for his misfortune but himself.

"They prospered, after a fashion, on the farm, but the old man was always boss, and although he expected the boys to dig in and give him their best, any idea of making them partners, and thereby tying up their interests and enthusiasms with his own, never entered his head. They worked from morning till night, never owned a decent suit of clothes, and had to ask for a quarter once a year to see the circus when it came to the village.

"By and by the old man invested his money in an auto, in which the whole family would occasionally go to the nearby city to take in the

'movies.' Every bit of sunshine that came into the lives of those boys soon became associated with the dazzling glare of the city, every bit of work on the old farm became mere drudgery. Without knowing it, the old man had thoroughly inoculated those boys with discontent for their lot. In the city, boys worked eight hours and got a man's pay, owned good clothes, mixed freely with their kind, and were, at least in the eyes of those green country lads, supremely happy. What happened? Those boys took that auto, went to the city, sold it for what it would bring, and set out to see real life. The old man was a proud old duffer, and positively refused to hunt them up. But his spirit was broken. He and his wife had slaved early and late to build up a great farm, which, in all good faith, they expected to leave to those boys. But they had failed to develop the

lads as individuals with wills and personalities of their own. And that is just what I've done exactly, only in a different way. They had failed to train them to be independently efficient, and the birds flew. He never heard of them again till one was killed in a drunken brawl in Chicago, and the other crippled for life while bumming from one city to another.

"I remember I went to his house one evening on business. I found him seated by the table in the little kitchen, sobbing, his head buried in his hands, and Mandy, his faithful wife, stretched prostrate on the old hair settle. Before him lay a big letter from Washington, and a pile of pamphlets entitled 'Protecting Your Hogs Against Cholera.' I inquired what the trouble was, and this is what he told me.

" 'John, I'm the most unhappy man alive. My life is nothing but a failure, and I've worked hard. I

had my whole season's hogs fatted and ready for the market, expecting to ship them next week. Suddenly one got sick with a strange new malady. I sent for neighbor Tibbs, who raises many hogs, and he said, by gol! it was a new one on him, that I better get the County Farm expert to make an examination. We 'phoned him, and he came, looked wise, made a few notes, said I'd better isolate the sick hog; meanwhile he'd investigate. I did so, but in the morning I had twenty sick hogs, and neighbor Thorndike and neighbor Johnson both sent word that they had sick hogs. At noon the county expert returned and brought with him the Professor of Animal Husbandry from the State Agricultural College. Together they made another examination, and were more puzzled than ever. Finally they wired the Department of Agriculture at Washington requesting them

to send on scientific experts to make an investigation. Two-thirds of my hogs have died.

" 'The national experts went home, and today I got this long letter and these pamphlets telling me just what to do in case the thing happens again. John,' he said earnestly, '*every* plagued man in this country was interested in my hogs. But what breaks Mandy and me up so bad is that *nobody* ever gave a dern about our boys. If we had just had a little of this scientific advice about how to deal with them from government experts, we no doubt could have saved them, and then the dern hogs wouldn't have made any difference.'

"Lawson, right there and then I decided that the city, with its up-to-date schools and churches, its variety of trained instructors, its Young Men's Christian Associations, its public libraries, and its oppor-

tunities to see and hear the very best in people and entertainment, was the only fair place to raise a boy, and I have been satisfied with my theory perfectly until now. The reason I have changed my mind now is very simple. It is because it doesn't work. My son has had all these privileges and opportunities in abundance, and many more, in the way of travel with his *mother*, summer outings, and a reasonable amount of spending money. Yet, day before yesterday, I was suddenly called home to the bedside of my son, who was suffering from a terrible hemorrhage. I was informed by our family physician that John had developed quick consumption from the kind of a life he had been living since entering high school, and that his chances of recovery were very slim. He must be taken to the Colorado Rockies at once, live in a tent cottage, and I must be his

attendant day and night, to be sure that melancholia does not rob us of even that fighting chance. At the best, he must spend the rest of his days in the open sunshine and with congenial company. The son that was one day to head my business! I hear you say at once 'a very exceptional case!' Perhaps so. It is exceptionally acute, Lawson. But, listen to me, exceptional in no other way. I'm not going to burden you now with the details of my three days' personal investigation of chaps his age—his friends; but just let me say, Lawson, that the things I found out that every city boy knows would give dozens of the best citizens in this city the nightmare. Lawson, in the name of God, take three days off and find out what your boy knows. You and your wife, like me and my wife, are smug and self-satisfied. You live in the best residential section, your children go to the best schools

and churches, you are fine folks, of unquestionable character; but this tremendous fact still remains, your children are the children of a big modern city.

"I have come to this definite opinion, Lawson, that no matter what our theories, the way we live at present, it is practically impossible to rear a boy in a big city and bring him to a clean, broadminded, wholesome manhood. And what is even a more important conclusion is that it is not the boy's fault, nor entirely the fault of his parents. Mind you, man, I am not saying that every city-bred boy is destined to become a bum. But I am saying that if he does escape from a decided tendency toward moral obliquity, and even degeneracy, it will be because a distinctly unusual and uncommon influence fortunately comes into his life. The fact still remains, that, although many a city chap puts up almost a

superhuman effort for decent manhood, he fails because of one unfortunate act in which he is caught, or which in his case proves to be a decisive incident in his fight for character. There are thousands of our best lads who, so far as we can see, have made good, but in reality have merely succeeded in secretly pulling out the nail of moral offense and filling the unremovable hole with the putty of shrewdness. And I am not saying that such procedure isn't entirely justifiable. Doesn't this explain why it is that time after time, from among our very own acquaintance, a middle-aged man of apparently irreproachable character suddenly goes to pieces? Believe me, Lawson, it is simply a case of the putty rattling out of the hole and exposing the original mark of youthful indiscretion, or degeneracy, just as you wish to name it.

"The fact is simply this: I am

satisfied that modern city life *prematurely matures* a boy. It brings to him all the wild desires and impressions of manhood, without any of the self-control or judgment of a man. Result?—You know as well as I. Oh, the tragedy of it all! Yet we are so busy gaining and holding for ourselves a place in the terrific competition of modern success that most of our lads are compelled to fight their fiercest fights alone, without the counsel or wise encouragement of their most logical companion, the father. Lawson, you think you know your boy. You think you know what your boy knows. You know neither. Take my advice. Take a few days off and quietly investigate. Good-by, old man, and better success to you than I have had. I leave on the midnight train. I just came here today to sense for the last time that indefinable, intangibly fascinat-

ing thing we call modern progress. But what *does* a man gain anyway if he *gets* the *whole* world and *loses* his *own* sons—at least to their best selves?"

II

HE SETS OUT ON THE TRAIL

II

HE SETS OUT ON THE TRAIL

"I heard a popular lecturer make a lot of such statements six months ago," said Mr. Wentwerp to himself, as he passed from the Club to the crisp outside air, "but I thought it was just a hobby. I never have been much for these would-be reformers, for usually they get off on a tangent and never see things in their completeness. But when a man of Taylor's sort talks like that it's time to stop and listen, for he is certainly anything but a hot air pusher."

As he hurried to catch a car there was just one thing uppermost in his mind—did he really know his boy, or was he satisfied just to *think* he did? True, he had thought of him

so far as a mere child, but, come to think of it, he was already sixteen past, and had put on long trousers—yes, bless your heart, he had even heard at the table a few days ago some talk of a dress suit.

He believed he had the lad's confidence—at least there had been no real rebellion—and he was sure he could get closer if he definitely set out to do so. As he hastened on, he was conscious for the first time of how absolutely little he did actually know of his own son's life and habits. He remembered that a few months ago his wife had come to him in great distress with a package of cigarettes that she had found in her son's top coat pocket. He remembered what she had said to him about "some horrid degenerate" teaching her little Jamie to smoke those "vile things." He remembered how he had satisfied her by telling her that every lad went through that

peculiar period when he gave such things a trial, but that it wouldn't amount to anything; a lad of his breeding wouldn't waste much time on such things; let him experiment a bit for himself; it was awfully hard to tell a boy anything about those things. Yet he remembered how he had promised to give the lad a talking to, and his conscience hurt just a little now at the superficiality of what he had said to him then.

"I wonder if *Mother* has ever told that lad what he ought to know about his body," he mused. "Hope she has. I have always thought it would be so much easier for Mother to tell him than for me, because her relations with him have been so much more intimate. I must look into that matter at once. What if she has not! I'll wager he has the information all right, and got it no doubt the same place I did—at the corner store."

Mr. Lawson Wentwerp boarded a car *en route* for home. He had often gotten on the car when there were a number of high school students aboard, but usually had been so engrossed in his paper or his day's business that he had paid very little attention to their chatter. He had noticed, though, that many of the girls were dressed much more suitably for a party than for the duties of a serious minded student, but it concerned him little, and so he gave it very little constructive thought.

There was a group of six or seven high school lads standing at the front end of the car, so he pushed near to them with critical eyes and ears to make his first mental notes in a quiet investigation, for to investigate he was now determined.

"Believe me, beau, she's some chicken!" said a tall, sallow faced, narrow chested lad. "She isn't a bit like a lot of these other fluzies. And

what's more, her pink cheeks are real —no rouge or 'Flesh Tint' about them."

"O piffle!" remarked a pimple-faced chap. "Give me a bird you don't have to be so blamed particular around."

"What Beetle really wants is a 'rag and a bone and a hank o' hair,' " laughed a third. "He isn't a bit particular so long as it wears skirts and chews gum."

"That may be so," retorted the first speaker, "but after all is said, there's only one Nell Wentwerp, and she's a peach; her brother notwithstanding. He thinks he's some cheese, but he's 'mentally hallucinated,' as Prof. Gates would say. I don't blame her a bit for turning up her nose at a bunch of rough necks like us. Her Ma is on the job, that's all, and there's no foolishness going on evenings at that house. She's not in the same class with some of

these other birds. Let's let her alone."

"Cut that Sunday school dope, Squib. That sort of Billy Sunday you're-sure-to-go-to-hell stuff is all stale now. The grand rush for the sawdust trail is over, and you're no better than any of the rest."

The bell rang, the car stopped, and the bunch piled boisterously out. The last Mr. Wentwerp heard was, "Give me the makin's, Squib. I haven't sucked a pill for a deuce of a long while."

To say that Mr. Wentwerp was disgusted would be to put it mildly. He was furious. He realized that his face must be very red, so he dropped into the first seat and buried himself in his paper—not to read, however, but just to think. The reference to his very own little Nell brought him face to face with the problem. "Why, she is a mere child yet," he mused, "and already she is

the topic of conversation for vulgar wagging tongues." It set him to thinking of his plan, and soon the details were worked out. He would not eat much dinner that night, and would complain of a tired feeling. His ever-solicitous wife would at once declare that he was working too hard and would urge more rest. He would acquiesce, and not go back down town after dinner, as had been his custom the last couple of years, since the two companies had merged into one, but would lounge about and size up the situation from the home end.

He remembered now that Mr. Stockdale, who had under his direction all of the young boys employed at the plant, had often said that he would not hire a high school boy, because they were snobbish and lazy and had girls on the brain. He had always attributed that attitude, however, to the fact that Mr. Stockdale

was a self-made man, and that he was prejudiced. Perhaps Stockdale was right after all. He would chat with him about it.

Much of an address that he had heard at the church several months before by a Boys' Work specialist on Adolescence and kindred themes, came back to him with new meaning. He had not disbelieved the speaker then, but supposed he had reference largely to the children of the slums and of the factory classes. He suddenly had a desire to hear just such a talk again. Yet surely there were books on the subject of boy life and development. He would get one at the first opportunity and do some personal reading. No doubt they would know just what to give him at the Young Men's Christian Association, and he would feel free to ask there, for didn't he contribute freely there each year—not because he knew very well just what they

were trying to do in the old building on the corner, but because Mr. Taylor had urged him to "have a hand in the good work that supplied a home for the boy away from home and took a personal interest in young men at a critical age."

At home he found the usual quiet disturbed, and Mrs. Wentwerp sobbing. To his inquiry, she replied, "O Daddy, James is getting to be too much for me to handle. Things aren't like they used to be any more. James is growing so fast. You just must have a talk with him. It is simply scandalous how he storms about this house of late, expressing his feelings. He wanted early dinner this evening, so he could dress early. Nora fixed it for him, and it didn't suit, so he raked her over the coals. Poor girl! she got angry, and we had a terrible time. It has quite upset me.

"When I got home this afternoon there were three suits of clothes here

on approval, and he informed me he simply had to have new clothes for the dance tonight, and that you were too blamed busy talking politics with would-be senators to have time to care whether he went out in a bathing suit or his pajamas. I told him he had no right to buy clothes such as he has bought without your sanction, and he grew furious. He spoke of his 'old man' as nothing but a 'stingy old tight-wad anyway,' and declared that you didn't give him half enough of an allowance to let him travel with his kind. Lawson, you just must take that boy in hand. All this week some silly girls have been calling him up in the evening and inviting him out to ride in their electrics. Nell says they are not her kind, but that's all she will say."

"What's going on tonight, Mother, that the boy is off to so early?"

"O the Si Sis are having a dance, and of course James must go. Those

boys were so nice about helping him through his exams after his sickness."

"Where do the Si Sis dance, Mother?"

"At the Acacia, I suppose, Lawson."

When they had all gone into the living room that evening, Mr. Wentwerp drew Nell into a quiet conversation and got her to discussing the things he wanted most to know about. So shrewdly did he ask his questions that she hardly realized they were questions.

"Yes, Daddy, James is awfully fresh sometimes; and he often walks home after school with girls that aren't a bit nice. But he doesn't know that I know it. He is considered 'fast' by most of the girls."

When Mr. Wentwerp was sure the dance of the Si Sis was on in full swing, he took his coat and hat and left the house. He had a desire to know just what such an occasion

was like among the better class of boys. To get to the hotel he had to pass the Young Men's Christian Association, and so it happened that he slipped in to ask for a book on boys of high school age.

"Mighty glad to know you, Mr. Wentwerp," said the Secretary. "Certainly, we have just what you want. Burr's 'Adolescent Boyhood' is very suggestive and helpful, and as for the proper information to give a boy of that age I'm sure you will find H. H. Moore's little volume, 'Keeping in Condition,' just what you want. Be glad to lend you both of them. Bring them back when you get ready. If there's anything else we can do for you, we'll be glad to do it."

"Do you really mean that?" asked Mr. Wentwerp, earnestly. "If so, may I speak to you in your private office?"

He spent an hour there that was

fairly a revelation to him, and sent him out positive that whatever he did find to be the real condition in regard to his only son, he himself, in the last analysis, was the responsible party. Of course, circumstances over which he as a father had no control were responsible for much of his son's danger. But certainly it was a father's plain duty to explain to his son the meaning of his surroundings, not to leave him to discover this through bitter experience.

He had put the question straight—"What kind of a boy is my boy?" and he had gotten the answer back as frankly, "He is on thin ice. He is with the wrong crowd, and he is slipping. Now is the time to save him. Next month will be too late."

"I'm so sorry you were unable to join our Fathers' Club and hear those splendid talks on the growing boy. I think that in many ways our Father and Son Banquet was the most

worth-while meeting that has been held for fathers in our city. Some way it is so difficult to get busy men to give time to such things—they leave all to mother and the Sunday school."

Thank God, then, there was time yet! He put the books in his pocket and hastened to the hotel. The things that a thoroughly-aroused, keen-minded business man found out for himself that night would make a book. If you are interested, make such an investigation yourself. You will come nearer to believing the facts, which, by the way, were not particularly *immoral*, but certainly *unmoral*. Mr. Lawson Wentwerp took a heavy heart home that night, but it had for company a strong determination, and the result was encouraging.

III

HE ATTENDS THE GAME

III

HE ATTENDS THE GAME

At breakfast James was very sleepy, and his father noted that the old time luster was gone from his eye, and the boyish enthusiasm of a comparatively short time ago was lacking. Several times he sighed unconsciously, but ate in silence. He listened with amazement to his father's announcement that he was going to let up on work a little for awhile, and that he would therefore have his afternoons and evenings free, and would be very glad to be taken into some of James's pastimes. Just before it was time for him to go to school, James asked permission to go to Motteville the next day with the football team. It was to be the championship game, and a great many of the "boys" were going

along to root. Mr. Wentwerp gave his consent, and then and there determined that he, too, would spend the day in Motteville; not as a spy, but just to see for himself what the influence of such a trip would be on a boy.

It was a "tight" game. Both teams had trained hard and the game was well fought, but from the side lines Mr. Wentwerp found himself wondering over and over again why James Wentwerp was not on the team, in the fray, as he was positive he himself would have been if he had had such a chance back in his day. He almost loathed the gang of "chauncies" that raced up and down the side lines, puffing at "cigs" or pulling on little curved stemmed pipes, with postage-stamp caps on their heads, while they waved long felt pennants on slender canes and cheered hoarsely. Their overcoats were pulled well up around their

necks, while their trousers were reefed high to expose loud embroidered socks and low cut English shoes.

"Some chaps' brains would rattle in a mustard seed," muttered Mr. Wentwerp. He himself stayed well back in the crowd, yet several times he saw young fellows bump unceremoniously into unescorted girls, sometimes grabbing them and dancing wildly about with them to "boost for the team."

Motteville won, and of course the little city went wild. The visiting team stayed over for a reception and dance in their honor, and, logically, many of the rooters stayed also. In an hour all cigar stores, candy shops, and pool halls, were flooded with young boys, for there was no place else for them to go. "Cigs" were plentiful, and everybody joined in the "fellowship." A few of the bolder ones slipped off in small parties to "see the sights." Several of the

visiting boys proudly displayed to their conquering foes just how well they could "navigate with several schooners aboard," and were the objects of many a rude jest from their sober fellows. Bevies of innocent school girls passed up and down the streets making merry, only to have many vulgar remarks tossed after them by laughing bystanders.

Farther down the street, where the lights were not so plentiful and where travel was less frequent, Mr. Wentwerp followed a laughing, smoking group of boys. At the corner store two painted females ambled out and engaged the lads in conversation. Confident that no one would recognize him, Mr. Wentwerp also crossed over and paused, as if to await a car, but in reality to see what he could hear.

"I told 'em we'd find some kiddos like you if we just kept on going," said one boy familiarly.

"We're here all right," was the reply. "But are you sure your mother knows you're out?"

"How much coin have you got?" asked the other girl, nudging one of the boys knowingly.

"O plenty, sis," replied the first speaker. "It don't take much, does it?" And they all laughed.

Mr. Wentwerp looked after them sadly. "If there are two such in this town, there are many more," he said to himself.

Upon reaching the hotel he found a gang of boys gathered close together, intently listening to a smutty story that was being entertainingly told by a member of the faculty, punctuated by long dashes of brown liquid aimed at a huge brass cuspidor, upon which was printed the edifying suggestion "Aim before you fire."

James Wentwerp sat at one end, leaning well back in a rocker, his feet crossed on top of a radiator and

a "cig" in his fingers. His father observed him quietly for some moments, and could not help noticing how expertly the lad flicked the ashes from the end as he leaned forward so that he might hear every word of the yarn. Some of the same sort of stories that Mr. Wentwerp had heard twenty years before suddenly flashed into his mind with a vividness that staggered him. He would have given anything that he possessed just to be able to forget them, yet he knew full well that they were burned in with fire, and he guessed that the same process was going on around that brass cuspidor now. He fairly yearned to take that yellow pup by the neck and wipe up the floor with him, but forbore the pleasure, for it would balk his whole plan.

On the way home he kept himself well out of sight until the train had gotten under way, then he ambled

through in search of James, taking in bits of conversation and sizing up the group as he passed. He found James and two of the chaps he had seen on the car the day before seated about a table in the club car, smoking, and drinking ginger ale in a thoroughly abandoned way. A blind man from Mars would have known that they were typical young city sports.

"Why, Father!" exclaimed James, in great surprise and embarrassment. "You here?"

"Yes, son," said Mr. Wentwerp genially. "I had business in Motteville today and just got through. I saw the football gang and knew you would be aboard. Have you had a nice time? Seems like a glum crowd, to say the least."

"Punk!" spoke up one of the boys. "Got licked right from start to finish. If our quarter had only been willing to play the same kind of a game as the other team played it would have

been a lead-pipe cinch for us. But he's so dog-on square that it's ridiculous. He's the President of that High Y Club, and says it's up to a fellow to live his religion nowadays. But say, what's religion got to do with football? I say, by thunder, if they play you dirt all the time, let 'em have some of it back again. Football isn't a prayer-meeting game!"

James flushed to the roots of his hair, for his father was an elder in the Presbyterian church and had some very positive ideas about what it meant to be square, as James too well knew.

"I want to meet that quarter back. Is he on this train, James?" said Mr. Wentwerp loudly, so all could hear. "He must be different from the rest of the bunch." James arose, with a wink to his companions, and started back through the car with his father in search of the now very unpopular quarter back.

"O you big boob!" growled Beetle. "You haven't got the sense God promised an oyster! Didn't you catch on that was Jim's dad? That trap of yours is continually getting some one into trouble anyway."

When they came to where the quarter back was seated, apparently alone and noticeably downcast, James nudged him, and said, "Shorty, this is my father. He wants to meet you. Shorty Williams, my father." Shorty was on his feet in an instant, his hand extended.

"Young man," said Mr. Wentwerp in distinct tones that were audible half the length of the car, "I'm mighty pleased to know you. I just heard a fellow back in the club car pay you a great compliment, and I want to tell you it's great to see a chap that has the grit to stand by his own convictions, even when a whole regiment of rah-rah pinheads, that can't do anything but dance up

and down the side lines and tell you how to do it, criticise you. I'm pleased to know you, sir, and I want to see more of you. James, invite him out to dinner soon, won't you?"

A dozen girls giggled. James felt the perspiration on his own red face, but said nothing, and they sat down. James sighed heavily and looked out of the window at the lights along the river. Some way he felt so very uncomfortable.

"You must be tired, boy," volunteered Mr. Wentwerp, casually.

"Dog tired, Father. It's been a very *strenuous* day for me. You see I was out a bit late last night, and the night before we went to see 'Madame X,' so I'm about all in."

Mr. Wentwerp mused several seconds, then he burst out, his voice full of feeling: "I always was ambitious to play football. I'd have walked ten miles to see a good game

any day. But I never had a chance. I always had to work for Father."

"But, Father, you never have gone to a game in the city, and we have some wonderfully fine ones in season."

"I know it," replied Mr. Wentwerp, still looking straight into the boy's eyes. "For two reasons, James. First, I'm always busy; too busy, in fact, with my business; and second, the ordinary crowd of 'side line onlookers' at any sort of an athletic contest get on my nerves. They disgust me beyond measure. They are, in large part, a lot of weaklings, not so much mentally as physically. I tell you, my boy, I realize more every day of my life that the first prime requirement for success in city life as we live it today is a healthy vigorous body; a body that is trained to obey your will. I am just realizing that only trained muscle is the organ of a man's will anyway, and that without will a man is whipped

before he begins in the battle for character."

James became very restless. He very much disliked his father's little moral exhortations, for without his making them in any way personal, James always went away feeling that his father had been talking about him. While he had never had the courage to tell his father so, he was certain that the "old gent" was old fashioned and a fogy on most moral questions, and that he absolutely did not understand how different the times were now from what they were when he was a lad. He was no worse than any of the rest of the boys, and besides, he moved in what was commonly called the best class of boys. So why worry about it? If there was anything in all the world that he absolutely abhorred, it was a sanctimonious goody-goody boy, and he would go to the limit any time to prove he did not belong in

that class. It was very late when they reached home that night, and both went off to bed without any further conversation.

IV

HE MAKES COMPARISONS

IV

HE MAKES COMPARISONS

The next day brought news to the Wentwerps. Mrs. Scott, a widowed aunt, with her son and daughter, were coming from the country to spend a few weeks to consult an eye specialist. Of course they would stay with the Wentwerps while in the city.

"Aunt Belle is a dear old soul," said Mrs. Wentwerp, as she folded up the letter. "She has never had any advantages, to be sure. Her grammar will be very bad, and her clothes—I almost shudder to think of them! But she is so real and genuine and radiant that no matter what she wears she is pleasing. She has worked hard all her life, especially since John's death, to keep the little family together and give the children what schooling she could. They have

not traveled much. I doubt if any of them have ever slept in a Pullman or eaten on a diner. But they have always been blessed with an abundance of health, and there isn't a lazy atom in them."

"I suppose we'll have to show the jakes about, won't we?" growled James. But his father surprised him by promptly saying:

"No, not if you don't care to, James. You have so many worthwhile and important things to consume your time that we won't impose on you, will we, Mother? You see I am to work only half a day now for a time, and it comes just right. I'll take them all in the car, and it will help me to spend my time. It will be a treat to be with Belle again —her philosophy and her vigorous healthy optimism will do me good. I have always admired the thrift of the family, and I tell you there is many a farmer that does not know as

much about how to use his land and stock as does Abner Scott. I can hardly realize that he is the manager and *is* making good on that great old farm. There isn't a city boy in a thousand that could hold down a job like that, with only one good year spent in a small agricultural college to his credit."

"It will be such a treat for the lad, too, Father," spoke up Mrs. Wentwerp. "I don't believe he has ever been in the city in his life, and there is so much that is worth while that he and Mary will want to see and hear. She loves good pictures—her mother has often told me so—and of course you will want to take them to the Art Institute, the Museums, the Library, and other public buildings."

"Yes, and I think the Dry Farming Exhibit at the Coliseum will please Abner very much, and the Apple Show is on——"

"O gee!" groaned James in disgust. "I thought you wanted to show them the city. What do they care about all that rot? What they want is a time. They'll fool you, I bet. What they want to see is city life —the theatre, the 'jit shows' and a burlesque or two. Dad, take them down to 'Toney's Place' for dinner some night and let them see a real cabaret. Good Lord! They aren't coming to the city to attend protracted meetings. They will want to see the sights. You can take them to the Art Galleries and a pink tea or two while I am at school, but if they want to see anything worth while, I'll show them the sights—unless they are regular Rubes. If they are, Father, it's up to you. Mother, do you suppose they eat pie with a knife; and do they wear red underclothes? I saw a bunch of those backwoods Missourians last spring at the circus, and I nearly

killed myself laughing at them. Those jakes had on the same style clothes Noah's sailors wore. Now wouldn't I look swell going about town with a couple of real Jaspers—country cousins! Father, I'm glad you're going to have some time, for if *my* bunch should see me with them I'd never hear the last of it."

Mrs. Wentwerp was much annoyed, and Mr. Wentwerp, inwardly at least, was disgusted. He bit his lips before he spoke, and then it was with deliberation.

"Well, just remember this, my son," said he. "It isn't feathers that make the birds. I am convinced that you and your pals have a very wrong conception of life. I want you to put yourself out to make Abner have a good time, just as a favor to me. His father was mighty kind to me when I was a lad, and as for Mary, unless I'm mistaken, she will cause many of your up-to-date cute

little fluffy over-dressed school girls to sit up and take notice, when it comes to health, vitality, and vigorous self-reliance. I'm glad they are coming. It will, in a measure at least, show you city children something of the strength and genuineness of the country, and help you to realize how absolutely superficial and false are many of our standards and practices here in this big city."

The Scotts arrived in time for dinner, but James did not reach home until late in the evening. He went directly to his room and brushed, combed, and dusted until he looked his best. He then descended the stairs in his unconsciously supercilious manner, and paused at the door, a condescending smile on his face. Before him sat Mary, a simple, shy, little lady, with the rosiest cheeks he had ever seen, her mass of black hair parted simply and braided in a huge unconventional braid that

hung to her waist. She was noticeably a bit uncomfortable, and her frock, while neat and becoming, was at least five years out of style. His mother introduced them, and when she, as a matter of course and family courtesy, offered to kiss her dapper, properly tailored city cousin, he promptly took advantage of the opportunity, much to her embarrassment. He then turned to meet Abner, who had taken in the whole situation at a glance and had unconsciously resented the attitude of his cousin. The next instant James was standing on his tiptoes, his mouth wide open in astonishment.

"Holy smoke, guy!" he breathed, as he tugged to release his hand from the iron grip of his cousin. "What do you think I am—a bank note?"

"I'm glad to meet you, James," said Abner, then sat down again. Next came the introduction to Aunt

Belle. Then James sought a seat, but beside Mary, much to her discomfiture.

At this juncture Aunt Belle excused herself, and soon returned with an armful of packages. They were little presents for each one of the Wentwerps, and were presented with a simple grace and dignity that was as charming as it was real.

Mr. Wentwerp was much interested in the development of the old farm, and Abner, with very little encouragement and no little enthusiasm, talked on and on about rotation of crops, the new cement silo, and what the cream separator had meant to profits; of the prize Durham shorthorns, and the destruction of the fly in the spring wheat; of how he had used a new incubator and brooder with great success, and of the many uses of an auto on a present-day farm.

Plainly James was bored to death.

He fidgeted nervously, and two or three times he chanced a knowing wink at his mother. Finally, with a yawn, he excused himself and went to his room, package in hand. A few seconds later a wild laugh came from that direction. His father was nettled beyond endurance, and rising he went to James' door. He knocked, then entered. James stood before the glass convulsed with laughter, while about his neck was tied a gaudy, heavily padded tie.

"O Dad, isn't that swell!" he burst out. "I'll bet it cost seventeen cents at the Pumpkin Center Emporium. Dad, they are as green as grass; and all that big lubber knows is how much corn it takes to fat a hog, or how many chickens you may expect from an incubator setting. Lordy! wouldn't he be great goods for a gold brick merchant. And he *does* wear red underclothes. I saw a sleeve sticking down below his flannel shirt."

His father eyed the boy critically for a moment, and choked back what he had intended to say, for he well realized that not for any reason whatsoever must he break the friendly relationship that now existed between himself and the boy. He had always treated the lad as an equal. He had invited his confidence whenever he really had had time; now he realized that if he was ever to find out the boy's real views and thoughts, the discovery would be made only by maintaining this confidence.

"Go easy, my boy," he said kindly. "Don't make it hard for your mother and me. I'm sure he has very much in him that is worth while. See if you can't discover that part and forget his country ways. Civilization is only skin deep, you know, and I'm positive Abner is a diamond in the rough." Then, with a twinkle, he added, "He could knock you into a cocked hat in two rounds, old boy.

Of that I'm certain. Did you note that chest and those shoulders? Wouldn't he make a whirlwind in a football suit?"

"No, Dad, he's too big and clumsy. I'll bet his feet aren't mates even."

"May be, boy, but I'll wager he can pitch bundles in the harvest field so fast it would make *you* dizzy. And as to his feet, I'll wager he's as nimble as a cat."

"O Father, what do you know about athletics? You don't even read the sport sheet, and you wouldn't know a basket-ball game from a game of tiddledywinks." He yanked off the new tie and tossed it contemptuously into the waste basket.

Mr. Wentwerp was about to answer, but he changed his mind. He simply bade the lad good-night, then returned to the living room where, in a kindly way, he made apology for the boy to his guests. After a little more conversation, he took Ab-

ner into his confidence, telling him he desired his help in giving the boy a jolt during his stay that would make him see things for himself.

V

HE FINDS AN ALLY

V

HE FINDS AN ALLY

Mr. Wentwerp went to bed that night, but not to sleep. His cool, analytical mind was too busy to sleep. Yet he was surprised, when an hour later his wife said to him in a wee, tremulous voice:

"Lawson, are you asleep?"

"No, my dear, but why aren't you?"

"I can't, Lawson, for thinking of the boy and the way he acted tonight. It has been growing on me these last few weeks that we have a problem on our hands. I've been hearing things, Lawson, and Nell has been dropping little suggestions lately —and—and—I've been keeping a secret from you, Lawson, because I know you haven't been well, and

it's eating out my heart. O Lawson, do you suppose there could be some awful thing in our James's life?—something like—you know what happened to Leslie Jones; the girl and the little baby, I mean."

Lawson Wentwerp went suddenly cold, and sat upright. "Mother, what do you mean?" he said, hardly above a whisper. "Tell me what is your secret? Why should you keep such——"

"O Lawson, I'm sure it isn't that. It just couldn't be with our boy. But the lad isn't well. He is thin, he is irritable; he doesn't eat, he avoids my eye; and day before yesterday I found a badly worn pamphlet in his pocket, and two dreadful pictures. It set me to thinking, and I've done nothing else since. Did you notice how he treated Mary tonight? Her fresh young beauty set him wild. I was so mortified at the way he stared at her and

watched her every move. Lawson, before long he'll be the kind of a boy you and I wouldn't want Nell to associate with."

"Yes—but the pamphlet, what was it, Mother? Tell me."

"It was the circular of a 'For Men Only' quack doctor, and many places in it were underlined with pencil. He has low views regarding women; he thinks the Church and religion are a joke, and that the main end of life is to have a good time. He told me the other day, when I mentioned the Golden Rule to him, that his Golden Rule was to 'do the other fellow, and do him first, before he gets a chance to do you.' He says the girls are worse than the boys, and that they love anything with pants on that will treat them occasionally. His talk is terrible for a boy of his breeding. Yesterday he wanted money. I asked him how much he had, and with a shrug he said, 'Mother, I'm

broke all but a twin.' I asked him what in the world he meant, and he replied, 'O thunder! Mother, you are so slow! Honest, all I've got left from this week's allowance is a pair of jits, and that won't even get me a dog sandwich.' "

"Mother, we never taught him to laugh at religion, nor to stare at a fresh country lass as though she were a street walker. He acted tonight like a regular snob, and you know how I detest snobbery. Was there anything save the quack pamphlet in his pocket?"

"No, Lawson. But don't you recall what that Boy Worker said that Sunday at church: 'Boys merely reflect in their own lives what they see and hear every day in the city, read in magazines, books, and papers, or pick up at the "movies." They learn everything they know by association and example, and their example is a city product.' James is a city boy,

and the city is coloring his life and hiding the true James, just as surely as the soot and dirt of the city make every English sparrow look like a miniature black bird."

"But the boy knows right from wrong, Mother. Surely the example of his father should be an influence. We have *sent* him to Sunday school, you have taken him to Bible conferences in the summer, and——"

"Yes, Lawson, but listen: James has not seen enough of you these last four years for your example to count for much. No doubt there are good influences too in his life, but they are neutralized. True, we have *sent* him to Sunday school, but we haven't *gone* with him. I doubt if you even know who his teacher is. I must confess I don't. Probably he is a well-meaning, conscientious fellow, but without a real understanding of the problem or any special training."

"Mother, you astound me! Where did you get all these terse observations? You never talked to me like this before."

"No, Lawson. I have just had my eyes opened during the last few days. I have been reading the books you brought from the Young Men's Christian Association on Adolescent Boys. They are wonderful, but they have made me very unhappy. Why, O why, didn't we have them long ago? You remember how I urged you to join that Fathers' Club, but you thought you were too busy—always too busy."

So they talked on and on, pouring out their hearts to each other, until both came to a profound realization that only under the wisdom and guidance of the Great Master of Destinies could they even hope for success in solving their problem. So it came about that quietly they knelt together and prayed. It was

not until the first grey dawn came creeping in at the east window that they slept. They thoroughly understood each other now, and both freely made confession of neglected duty, promising to be patient, and above all to *believe* in the precious lad.

When the household of Wentwerp gathered at breakfast the next morning—Abner and Mary fresh and ready for the day's sightseeing, Nell, quiet and courteous, James, sleepy and listless—they were not surprised to learn that Abner had been up two hours and had already "done" the neighborhood, sizing it up and coming to his own conclusions about it and the people that lived in it. He was shocked to find certain institutions snugly settled in the best residence sections. He was greatly impressed by the carloads of toilers he saw going to their work, their faces sad and listless. As he walked along,

his head up, his shoulders back, and a merry whistle coming from his lips, passers-by frowned upon him. What right had he to be light-hearted and so optimistic!

He complained of having seen three horses mistreated in one block. Then, too, an old lady, at least seventy years of age, stooped and bent, her shoes worn and her cloak ragged, had told him a pitiful tale and had asked him for a lift. He had promptly given her a dollar. He was not used to seeing so much suffering. In fact, he did not know that it existed; and it hurt him.

James gave him a "horse laugh" when he told of the incident. "Everybody on Grand Avenue will know you are a country jake in a few days," he blurted out. "You're easy, boy. This city is lousy with such grafters. Don't give anybody a cent. They are all bums—deaf, dumb, and blind alike. If you start any of this Good

Samaritan stuff in this burg you'll get fooled every hour."

Mr. Wentwerp carefully explained organized charity to Abner, while James went on with his breakfast. Mrs. Wentwerp made the plans for the day, which included a trip to the Botanical Gardens and lunch in a down-town department store.

"Don't let the floor walker get his lamps on you, Mary," laughed James in parting. "He's always on the lookout for peaches like you." He thought he would add "from the country," but a warning glance from his mother made him change his mind, so he hastily said, "They draw trade. I'll see you at three, old sport, and we'll do a batch of these 'jit houses.' I don't suppose you ever saw a moving picture in your life!" and he was gone.

In a week Abner knew more about the points of interest in and about the city than did James. The Public

Library was a favorite place with him, and he fairly reveled in the books on Dairying, Farming, and Poultry Raising. He visited the stock yards alone, James declining to waste time "bumming around a stable, even if it was bigger than ordinary." He learned about government inspection of meat, quarantine of diseased animals, buying and selling, slaughtering, and many other useful things, and made a great many notes for future reference. He read the papers and chatted intelligently about the stock market, the coming elections, and the great problem of the unemployed; all of which was of absolutely no interest to James, who remarked, "The sport sheet is all the paper there really is. The rest is a comic section, which tells the doings of boobs and fourflushers."

Mr. Wentwerp suggested a trip to the High School, and it was a wonderful sight to Abner, especially the

shops and laboratories—"stink factories," as James termed them. The only part that had ever impressed James, however, was the great commons room in the basement, where the school held all its social functions. To James, the building with its modern equipment, provided without cost, was at best an almost unbearable jail, where he was compelled to spend a certain number of hours each day bluffing his way through. But to Abner it suggested a great opportunity for fitting one's self to think more accurately and to do better work than he would be able to do without its advantages. To this country boy, who had learned the tremendous value of spare time, the inestimable privilege of study and books was the key to open the lock of opportunity. Abner would study, conscious of just what he wanted and needed in order to become a better farmer. James would study

because the social law provided that he must, and he might just as well spend his time that way as any other. Unfortunately, he had never had any sort of responsibility that would tend to show him the practical side or value of any of his education thus far. If the real truth were known, James had never once bothered his head about whether it was of any value to him or not. He went to school because every one else in his set went, and because you had to have a certain number of credits to get into Harvard.

"Let's walk through Jungle Park and go down to the river front this afternoon," said Abner, after dinner one day.

"O rats!" replied James in disgust. "Jungle Park is all right if you're going to play golf or tennis, but outside of that it's just a baby sanitarium. All the swells in the West End picket their offspring there all

summer under the care of maids while the grown-ups are having a good time. Speaking of the river front, the real time to see that is at night, and then there are sights a plenty. O slush! Get your high boots, boys! It's no place for a minister's son after dark. Why, I've seen 'em ten to one bench—so thick a fellow couldn't tell which girl he was loving. Then just when everything is lovely, along comes one of those old mud scows and flashes its searchlights around. I've seen 'em squeal and run for cover like a batch of cockroaches. Great sport. It's nothing but boats and docks and warehouses in the day time, not counting the rats."

Abner was amazed. "Why, that's what I want to see—those great grain elevators and the tanneries and docks. A great deal of my annual product finds its way into them."

"O I suppose so!" sneered James.

Then, under his breath, "Rubes and products go together." He caught a warning glance from his father, and that was enough. He broke into a laugh.

"Let's go down to the Princess instead, Dad," urged James. "There is a swell Photo Play on there this week. Been having mobs. They wouldn't let them show it in the East at all, but any old thing gets by in this burg."

Mr. Wentwerp considered, then decided in favor of the Princess. He would see just what effect such a show would have on the two boys. He knew, too, that the Princess was one of James's favorite haunts, but he had never once been in it.

As James had said, the room was packed. A large percentage of the audience were young people. The mechanics of the picture fairly fascinated Abner. The story disgusted him, and he was frank to say so.

James never gave the mechanics of the play a thought. The plot was what fascinated him. It was a story of the underworld, and showed just how the great vice system enlisted new recruits from the army of country girls that annually move to the cities.

The next evening the entire family went to Grand Opera, and it then developed that the only real show Mary and Abner had ever seen was Ben Hur, not counting the country circus. Consequently they were entranced. On the other hand, James was bored almost to death, and made it clearly understood that he always preferred comic opera "with a whale of a big chorus."

The next day Abner showed signs of depression. The whirl, the noise, the glare of it all was getting on his nerves. He felt the need of more room, of green growing things, of the smell of fresh earth, the low of cattle,

the challenge of the rooster, the songs of birds. He began to miss keenly the comradeship of his collie, and the friendly neigh of his favorite horse as he approached the orchard. His depression was so noticeable that Mr. Wentwerp spoke of it. Even James sensed it, and at once suggested a remedy, for he had made up his mind to see to it that the unsophisticated Abner was thoroughly scandalized at least once before "retreating to the haymow."

"Father, this everlasting sight seeing is too tame for Abner. He is getting tired of it, just as I said he would. You stay at home tonight with the women folks and let me take him out for a spin in the car. I can make some excitement for him, I know."

Mr. Wentwerp consented, and it was suggested to Abner, but James was destined to disappointment, for, to his utter astonishment, Abner de-

clined, and said, "I would prefer a quiet evening at home, as I want to read up a little on the pasteurizing of milk before we go back. Anyway, I have no party clothes."

As Mr. Wentwerp sat that evening, supposedly thinking through some financial matters, his heart was indeed heavy. Day by day he was learning that his only son and heir had already progressed much farther along the broad highway toward subtle destruction than he had ever dared imagine. He realized full well that no amount or kind of talk would ever solve the problem. Nothing he could do, at least in the regular routine of life, would now materially help him. He realized very keenly that *his* real opportunity lay back in that period when the boy had first plunged into that marvelously wonderful new birth, adolescence; when he had left childhood behind and begun to be a man. He realized now

that at that time every sense had been abnormally alert to see and hear and smell the forbidden, and that the lad's life had simply been submerged with a flood of new impressions, imaginings, and desires, to say nothing of wonderful dreamy thoughts. His mind took him back even now to the same experience in his own life. What wouldn't *he* have given in those days for a friendly father who could have helped *him* interpret those strange new ideas, impressions, and attitudes! Fortunately such a friend *had* come into his life just at the critical time, but it had not been his own father. Evidently his own son had not been so fortunate.

But that opportunity was passed forever now, for the boy was already literally hypnotized, as were thousands of others, by the dazzle, the superficiality, the hypocrisy of city life. He realized that the boy had absolutely no true perspective, and

that he acted totally from impulse, the stimulus for which came from the life of the city. All the things that John G. Taylor had told him that day rushed back to his mind. He was satisfied now that it was all true. Why need he investigate further? He realized enough already to sicken the heart of any true father. What should he do? What could he do? He had never in all his life felt so helpless, so absolutely inadequate to meet a situation as he did now.

Suddenly it dawned upon him that Abner had been sent to him for a purpose—that he might see the contrast between the boys. Undoubtedly the lad's coming had helped him to see things much more clearly. How he admired Abner! The boy was not perfect by any means. He had great faults, in fact, for he was crude and unfinished. Yet the great thing about him was that he was growing, he was developing, he was

ambitious, he was alert, wide awake, keen. He was bound for a definite port, and he had a purpose. He had work that had to be done. He had responsibility, not only for himself but for others. If he stopped working, everything stopped. He was sure that the greatest thing of all was that Abner realized all these tremendous facts.

He was sure, too, that the solution for James, the only solution, in fact, lay in getting the boy to thinking for himself. His schooling was not teaching him to think. In fact, it was not teaching him anything that was fundamental. Not that it couldn't teach him, but that it wouldn't, until James of his own accord wished it to; not till James Wentwerp *willed* that it should contribute definite things, in order that he might be prepared to do definite things. James was a hothouse plant. What would happen to him when he was at last

transplanted into society—the society of a big city? Mr. Wentwerp shuddered at the answer. If he was to act, he must act quickly and surely.

He picked up Burr's "Studies in Adolescent Boyhood," and as he turned the pages the word "Summary" caught his eye, and he read: "Change is the law of adolescence. There is no stopping. There is always movement up or down. The great peril of the adolescent period lies in the fact that capacity for self-control does not keep pace with the growing intensity of impulse. Perhaps the abnormal conditions of modern civilization are responsible for this in some measure. The development and reenforcement of all the *regulative* faculties and forces should be the chief aim of parent, teacher, and leader."

"City life prematurely matures a boy, then," thought Wentwerp, "and I am just discovering it. What shall

I do?—send him to the country? But he would never stay, at least permanently. No, that will never do. I must save him, if I am to save him at all, without his knowing it. He would abhor me if he dreamed that my motive was to do him good."

It was left to the mother, as is so often the case with a growing boy, to find the key to the situation. She listened for two hours while her husband explained what he had been doing and what he had found out, then she spoke:

"Lawson, let me make a suggestion. I found it in that splendid book you brought. What that boy needs is a complete change of scene, friends, food, clothes, and everything. You have taken no vacation for years. Now is your chance. Get Dr. Doty to say you must go West at once, to prevent a complete nervous collapse —two months at least in the Rockies. You have always wanted to go, and

by your look you need it now. Take the boy with you. Live with him, sleep with him, fish with him—make him do the work largely, you are too sick to do it; I mean the gathering of the firewood and the tent pitching. Don't let a day go by without its positive lesson. Let him learn first hand. Make him shift for himself, under your tactful direction, of course. Make him know privation, hunger, thirst. Teach him team work. Tire him physically till he begs for mercy. Live on the plainest food. Wear the roughest clothes. Yes, go back farther, even to the real essentials of life—namely, *procuring* your own food, *securing* your own shelter. And may God bless you. I will care for the business. You think I can't do it. But, Lawson, I can do anything in this world to save my boy, now that I realize and understand."

"Mother, you are wonderful! As James would say, 'You show glim-

merings of intellect!' But I cannot go at once. It would be a month before I could go."

"Very well, then, let's enlist Aunt Belle. Send him home to the farm with Abner for a month to get into shape for such a trip. The let-down won't be so sudden."

"The very thing, Mother. You are a genius. And, listen, we will take Abner West with us. I can use him to help in so many ways, and the three of us will be company. Mother, it is the solution. I will go to the doctor at once. It must be arranged before Abner gets away home. I'll go tomorrow. And, Mother, if they should bring me home in an ambulance some day next week, and doctors should have a consultation, you will know, won't you? O Mother, we *must* save him, and we will!"

VI

HE PROVES AN EXPERT

VI

HE PROVES AN EXPERT

It was the middle of June in the Rockies. The Continental Divide still glistened white in her mantle of ice and snow. Every little mountain stream was already growing boisterous with the new melting snow, and even the first soft breezes of summer were stealing up the canyons to play with the tiny fresh aspen leaves.

A party of three, accompanied by a heavily packed, stalwart mountain burro, toiled up the old saw mill road toward Pemberton *en route* to the Platte and thence to the mysterious valley of the Lost Park. They were two boys and a man. Their outfit was apparently new, as was also their simple garb of high boots, khaki trousers, and olive drab

shirts. The more sturdy of the two boys carried a new Winchester rifle on his shoulder, and the man of the party was equipped with a Colts revolver, a small kodak, and a sweater. The third member lagged considerably behind and was evidently not in the best of humor; but no doubt he had hiked long and hard, and perhaps had developed, due to the unreasonableness of his new boots, a pair of lovely water blisters on his heels. If the truth were known, Mr. Wentwerp also had a pair, each about the size of a quarter, but he wouldn't have confessed it for worlds, although every step on the rough road nearly killed him. Abner was stepping along with unconcerned ease and comfort, entirely unaware of the suffering of his two companions. Several weeks of spring plowing had made it easy for him.

"Four o'clock," commented Mr.

Wentwerp, as he paused for a breathing spell.

"Good Lord! is that all?" grumbled James. "If this is what you call camping in the Rockies, then it's nix on it for me. I feel just like a hayseed that had walked twenty miles to town to see a circus. The idea of our coming away off here into this 'spacious desolation,' as old 'Geology Jones' calls it, for rest! Why, I'm so tired I'm liable to drop any minute."

"Who is 'Geology Jones'?" interrupted Abner, good naturedly. "I never have heard of him."

"I suppose not," snapped James. "But if you had to go to school instead of hunting rabbits all the time you'd know who he is. He's the nut at school that's always raving about the 'beauties of Nature' and the 'marvelous manifestations of Divine Force.' He makes me sick! I don't suppose he's ever been outside the

city limits either. He just reads that rot in books.

"When the Vanlandingham boys went camping last season, up into the north woods, they took two seasoned guides and a cook, and all the boys had to do was eat, fish, and sit by the fire and smoke. But when we hit camp tonight, if we ever do, and I am properly informed, we have then got to turn in, after walking at least ten miles, and put up a tent, gather fire wood, cook our own meal, and then put that braying jackass to bed. I'm so hungry now that I could chew a ham bone and drink condensed milk. If we walk much farther I even believe I could stand stewed prunes—and, believe me, Bo, that's going some."

Mr. Wentwerp only smiled, but left it to Abner to speak. He was laughing to himself, thinking of what sort of a commissary they would have had if James had done the buying.

"A bed of pine boughs, a little friendly camp fire, that big black squirrel stewed for supper, a wonderful starry night, and a quiet chat before we pile in—gee! boy, I'd walk twenty-five miles for that any day and call myself lucky. All my life I've wished for just this sort of thing, and I've been punching myself every few moments all day just to see if it is really me. All this lacks to be perfect for me is my father. How he would have enjoyed a jaunt like this," said Abner merrily. Then, more seriously, "But listen, James, I'm going to give you your first lesson on skinning and dressing a squirrel yet tonight. That's a fine art that you know nothing about."

James flashed right up.

"Now, Abe, I may be green, but I know blamed well you don't skin a squirrel at all. You simply singe off the hairs and fry the parts in dry bread crumbs and beaten eggs,

and serve with mustard sauce. I looked a few of those things up in the cook book myself before we started. So don't try to string me."

Abner simply roared, and Mr. Wentwerp threw his hat into the air and laughed until the tears came into his eyes. Whereupon James grew suddenly sullen, and said no more until they had made camp.

They chose a sheltered spot by the river for a camp, and to James's great surprise he discovered that his own father knew just how to cut tent pins from aspen limbs, and how to set a pair of crotches, and adjust various trammels to the cross pole for the coffee pot, the stew kettle, and a pail of dish water. The fire he built was small and pointed, and so located that the smoke blew away from the tent instead of into it, as it would have done if James had chosen the site. The boy watched his father's every move, and as the

building of the camp progressed he would not have been any more surprised than he was already if his father had suddenly announced his intention of flying and had promptly sprouted wings and soared away. He handled an ax with ease and grace. He trimmed boughs and thatched a smooth bed in a few moments. He took the ax, deliberately knocked the outer layer of punk from an apparently rotten pine log, exposed the pure pitch heart, cut it into convenient lengths and piled them up handy for the evening's fire.

"Why, Father," cried James, almost in awed tones, "I didn't know you knew so much about camping. I thought all you knew was business and investments. How did you learn it all anyway? Say, I wish I could cut wood like that. Do you suppose I could learn?"

He stepped over, took the new sharp ax and swung it carelessly over

his head and took a blind crack at a heavy pine knot, just missed it and snapped the handle off close up to the head. The ax head struck a granite boulder and made the sparks fly, and then half buried itself in the gravel. James looked quickly about him to see if anybody had been watching him, but his father was too quick for him, and turned away in disgust. Abner had seen, and of course stood with a broad smile on his good-natured face taking in the whole affair.

"What you trying to do, old Scout?" he said cheerily. "Clear off all these trees before bedtime, or chop down this mountain? That's the only ax in camp."

"Well, I guess we can send for another, can't we?" snapped James. "I don't suppose the bloody thing cost more than a hundred dollars, did it?"

Mr. Wentwerp spoke up gravely.

"No, we won't send for another, son. That ax must last us till our return. It will be some task to grind it by hand, but it must be done."

James looked at the battered edge before he spoke.

"Good Lord, Dad! is there a grindstone in camp? I didn't see it. I didn't mean to do it. I just didn't realize that I had so much strength."

Mr. Wentwerp smiled again in spite of himself.

"It wasn't strength that did it, my boy. It was simply lack of brains. Here is my little pocket carborundum. I'll show you how to use it. It will take you two hours at least, but it must be done tonight. That ax is worth all the rest of our outfit put together. I'll whittle a make-shift handle from a spruce sapling. It will be awfully clumsy, but will serve the purpose."

James bit his lip and was about to offer a remark, but changed his

mind. He could have done it if his father had gotten angry, but he was so calm about it, and there was so much comradeship in his voice that it took all the sting out.

At supper time James had more misfortunes. He spilled hot coffee down Abner's back and made him dance like a wild man. He then tripped over a stray stick of fire wood and spilled his own helping of stewed squirrel, then stumbled into it, burning his finger to a blister. He promptly lost his head completely, and said a lot of things for which he was afterward sorry.

Abner volunteered to do the dishes. He had very often helped at home, and so felt no compunctions. James declined to help, however, with the suggestion that he didn't mind doing *most* of the fishing and hunting, but when it came to being a "scullery maid" he drew the line.

Uncle Lawson made up the bed, and

James finally, under his father's directions, began work on the damaged ax with the tiny hand stone.

"If I'd known I'd be compelled to waste my time like this," he stormed, "I'd have brought a dozen axes along for my private use."

"One of the great things about camping, James," commented his father, "is to learn to get along and be comfortable with very little equipment. Roughing it is merely learning how to smooth it with rough things, and you will do better another time I am very sure. Any know-nothing can live at a summer hotel on the fat of the land, but it takes somewhat of a real man to live—especially with others—in a camp.

"Of course every camper must cut his eye teeth, but don't think you must learn everything in this world by experience. The trouble with the school of experience, either in camp or in life, is that when you are ready

to graduate you are too old for any service. It's a wise man that learns early to take a little good advice. I advise you, son, to keep your head, use your eyes, and think what you are doing; and let's remember that any misfortune to one must be paid for by all on this trip."

They chatted about the fire, made plans for the morrow and got their trout lines ready for a bit of early fishing. Mr. Wentwerp instructed them in the use of flies and talked over with them some of the essentials of successful trout fishing.

"Who in thunder told you so much, Dad?" James finally asked. "I didn't know you had ever been fishing in your life."

"O yes, my son. I fished a great deal when I was your age. I've caught many a five-pound bass and not a few 'muskies.' Two seasons before I was married I fished for trout in the Upper Peninsula, but

that was some years ago now. I'm just a bit out of practice, but I am very fond of fishing, and this sort of a thing in general, for that matter. Yes, this one day has made me feel ten years younger already."

James sat meditating. He had suddenly discovered that his father was a distinctly different kind of a human than he had ever supposed him to be, and in spite of himself he felt just a bit proud to be his son. It was a novel experience to feel so, and in spite of himself it gave him pleasure.

Abner was a good sport too, after all. James was beginning to see much in him that he liked, and certainly he had treated him square, and hadn't even laughed at him when he fell in the squirrel gravy. Perhaps he wasn't such a Rube after all, at least in some ways, for he was confident that every one of his "best sports" at school would have

rubbed it in well and given him the "horse laugh" beside.

Abner and Mr. Wentwerp got to chatting about lumber and floods and forest fires, the sheep and cattle war, and other commonplace things associated with the mountains, but because James knew absolutely nothing about such things, he kept quiet and ground away at his ax. At last Mr. Wentwerp spoke up.

"James, peel off those boots of yours and let me dress those blisters for you before we go to bed." James was astonished, and was strongly tempted to lie about it. Then he thought better of it, and replied:

"O they don't amount to anything. How did you know I had blisters, Father? I didn't say so."

Mr. Wentwerp chuckled. "O, because I have a pair of lovely ones myself. If they are properly cared for tonight they will give us no trouble, but if they are neglected and

get infected our fun is over for this trip. You and I are the tenderfeet, boy. Abner's feet are as tough as cowhide, and his lithe muscles are like tool-steel. But we will soon be in shape, too. Then Abner, old boy, look out; for our 'strap-hanging,' 'pavement-prancing' years haven't all been for naught."

The last dying embers were kicked together and the little group prepared to go to bed, when Mr. Wentwerp slipped his hand into his pocket and pulled out a tiny Testament and turned the pages deliberately as he spoke.

"We are a long way from home tonight, boys, and no doubt the folks are thinking of us. They know this is our first camp. It has always been a lot of inspiration to me, no matter how far I get away from all the dear family, just to stop before I crawl in and remember that it is the same Good Father that cares for us all,

no matter how far apart we happen to be."

"I've just been wondering this hour," spoke up Abner quietly, "how many times the brindle cow has kicked over Mary's milking stool since I came away. It was mighty good of her to offer to help like she did."

That instant was the very first time that day that James had given any one at home a thought, and inwardly he was ashamed. He was perfectly sure that his father adored his mother. He loved her, too, in his own way, but didn't know it, or else he would have thought of her many times that day. Just how much he really loved her was to be one of the great discoveries of this wonderful trip for him.

"What shall I read from the Guide Book?" asked Mr. Wentwerp in a perfectly normal, natural way.

There followed a few appropriate verses, and then a simple prayer that

was anything but cant. He mentioned all the loved ones at home by name, and closed by thanking the great All-Father for the privilege that was being theirs of living for a season close to Him in His big dooryard. It was the first time in his life that James had ever heard his father pray, and he went to his bed of pine boughs that night with a strange train of emotions playing in his heart. He lay a long time looking up at the stars above the uneven curtain of evergreens, thinking. For the first time he really considered carefully his own life and where it would ultimately lead him if he went on living it as he had the past three years. Deep down in his boy soul there was a dissatisfaction with the gang, his friends, and himself, but he would not own it, at least out loud. He charged his restlessness to the hard day's walk and to the altitude, and finally dozed off to a broken sleep.

VII

HE WINS THE PRIZE

VII

HE WINS THE PRIZE

There was a new spirit in the camp the next day, however, and James, to his own surprise, discovered that he really liked to help do the work. Unconsciously he was imitating. He watched his father dress the three splendid trout he had hooked before breakfast, and was sure he could do it the next time himself. He actually helped Abner fold the tent, and was delighted when his father invited him to help throw the diamond hitch on the little mule to secure the pack's safe transportation. He even ate oatmeal with canned milk for his breakfast, and relished it. He bravely pulled on his big boots without a word, ignoring blisters, because Father did. He knew full well that, if

he had been home, such a situation would have called for at least a two days' vacation, with a great deal of special fuss and attention.

An hour later he found himself actually asking Abner to *show him* how to do something. He had suddenly become eager to learn to shoot, and was quite excited over the possibility of his killing a squirrel for the evening meal; consequently he began to scan carefully every big tree they passed. He saw more things with his own eyes that day than he had ever seen before in one day of his life.

Twice that day he asked his father questions that plainly showed that the new environment was beginning to suggest new thoughts and that he was beginning to observe and make a series of new deductions.

That evening his father allowed him to cut and place the crotch and cross pole, and even to try his hand

at cutting the tent pegs, which privilege, strangely enough, greatly pleased him, and he was proud of the pegs he finally completed, crude as they were.

After supper their chat slipped off to a discussion of some of the old Western pioneers, heroes of early days, and of how they had fought and struggled to conquer the wilderness, not for themselves but for the generations to come. There was much talk of what the present generation owed them, and finally the talk led up to a discussion of the privilege and joy of making your life count in such a way that the world will be better in some way for your having lived in it. It was a new thought to James, and he pondered it a long while before sleep came to his thoroughly tired body.

The next day James and his father fished together from the shelter of the same great rock, and the fires

of real companionship were given substantial fuel. That afternoon it rained a regular deluge. Everybody and everything was soaked. O the fortitude and unselfishness it required to pitch a camp and get a meal that night! James fairly marveled at his father's patience, and more than once grew enthusiastic over the practical suggestions that Abner made. Inwardly he began to realize that Abner knew much about many things that were absolutely strange to him, and that after all his information was little and petty.

Oh! was a camp fire or a hot supper ever more enjoyed since the world began than that simple evening meal of boiled "spuds," fried bacon, and baking powder "choke-dog," as Abner called it.

That night the chat was about rain, and from that to storms, and so on back to the story of creation, and of how everything, clear down

to the most minute forms of life, had a definite place in the great scheme of life. From there it was but a step to a discussion of the seriousness of any fellow's failing to do the best he could in his own little sphere.

The rain was followed by a severe electric and wind storm. For a long time the three lay in bed watching the brilliant flashes and listening to the gale in the pines. Then no doubt it was the flapping of their own canvas that suggested the talk of great ships at sea in times of terrific storm, and again it was but a step to a bit of comment on what it means for a ship, laden with precious cargo, at such a time of storm to be unprepared, or perhaps rudderless, with no definite port in mind.

Mr. Wentwerp told the boys of the great Sargasso Sea in the North Atlantic, where fancy has it that thousands of derelict ships are going

round and round, unable to back away from the mysterious current.

As James fell asleep that night, he was strangely enough thinking of a lot of chaps that he knew who most certainly were in a Sargasso Sea of city life, many of them with their souls already gone, and their engines damaged by ignorance.

Early the next morning he saw a water ouzel taking her morning bath in the ice cold stream. He noted with surprise her apparent satisfaction as the cold glistening drops glided over her slate blue coat.

"She's sure got some will power," he commented to himself. "I don't believe I could lop into a cold bath every morning." Just then Abner came out from behind a clump of bushes, shivering as he dried his body. He had been up to the same trick, and then and there James determined to strip and go into that cold stream if it killed him. The

experience was a thrilling one, and it stimulated him for the entire day. Already there was new life flowing in his body, new color in his cheeks, and best of all, the fires of youth were again bursting into flame in the flash of his eyes. His blasé manners were slipping away, and he was finding himself interested in real life.

A few days later while exploring, he discovered an unusually fine pine cone full of tiny pine seeds. He carried it to camp and asked his father about it. It was the opportunity Mr. Wentwerp had craved so long, so that evening, as they sat close to the little friendship fire, he took the cone, carefully cut it apart with his knife so as to expose the tiny seeds and the fibers leading to them, and in a simple, unaffected way told the wonderful story of reproduction as it was evident everywhere in nature, showing how there

were kind and beneficent laws that controlled every phase of the development, and explaining carefully just how an abnormal condition coming in would spoil the seed. He added that the same wonderfully wise laws that governed the pine seed held good in the human family, but that folks as a whole were so indifferent and ignorant about these very laws that the whole world suffered untold misery annually as a result. And then, to make his point clear, he briefly told them of the hundreds of foundling homes and insane asylums and kindred institutions that are found all over the country, explaining their origin and emphasizing the cause.

The next day they came into a valley that was filled with beetle-killed trees, and both boys were interested and amazed to see the enormous destruction that could be wrought by so tiny a pest as the wood-boring beetle.

Mr. Wentwerp took the ax and dissected one great tree that was apparently sound. The heart was honeycombed with tiny galleries and simply alive with white grubs.

"And to think that this entire valley of magnificent pines perished because one tiny beetle of destruction got into the heart of a weak tree and found a germinating place. I've known of just that sort of a thing happening in the city, when a chap with a bad influence moves into a neighborhood or gets a foothold in a gang. We need to remember, fellows, that destruction doesn't always come by cyclone or cloudburst, but is much more powerful and destructive in the little things that gain access to our lives."

James found himself following his father everywhere now, asking him a thousand questions, drawing him out on the most sacred relations of life; and his father rejoiced. Day by day

he saw Abner and James becoming more congenial, each doing the other good, and a warmth of friendship and loyalty budding that gave him great satisfaction.

* * * * * *

It was a quiet Sunday evening, several weeks later, in camp, when James confessed to Abner, as they sat under a big pine high up on the mountain watching the sun go down, that he had thought, because Abner could not dance and because he tied his necktie backwards and did not care whether his trousers had a perfect crease in them or not, that he was "just a corn-fed Rube from the backwoods," but that he had learned he knew far more about the things that are really worth while in a fellow's life, and that count, than he himself did. In his boyish way, with real effort, he told how he admired his stalwart symmetrical body,

his clear, steady eye, his cool head, and most of all his big genial sympathetic spirit of friendship that invariably gave a fellow every advantage of the doubt and made a fellow want to be something more than he was.

Then they talked of Uncle Lawson, and Abner told James just what it meant to be a boy growing up without a father and to have to shift for himself and provide for a family beside; how splendid he thought Mr. Wentwerp was, and what an inspiration he had always been to him in his hard places, and how he had so often envied James and the opportunity that he had.

James, in turn, began to realize for the first time in his life how much *he* really cared for his Dad, and told Abner how he had never really known or appreciated his father before, and just how glad he was that they had come on this trip together,

although he had opposed coming very strenuously.

The great red disk was resting on the crest of a far-away peak. The purple haze of twilight was beginning to settle in the valley. Far away a turtle dove called its mate.

The two had risen now and were ready to go down again to the little camp below them, when Abner abruptly turned and put his arm on James' shoulder, looked him in the eye with a strange new light burning there, and said:

"Jimmie, old boy, I'm going to tell you a great secret. Perhaps you will think me foolish, but I'm going to tell you anyway, for your own sake. It has helped me so wonderfully that I believe it will you, too, when you see it as I did. I'm satisfied that it is very much harder for a fellow to keep his thoughts clean in a city like yours than it is for a fellow to do the right thing in the

country. But listen to me: my mother has always known how I have admired your father and how I have missed not having one myself to help me. Well, one Sunday evening as we were driving home together, she said to me, 'Abner, you are getting to be a man fast. Some of these days you will be seeing the little lady-bird that will capture your heart, and long before you tell a soul you will be dreaming big dreams and building beautiful air castles. Laddie, you have had no father these many years to be telling you the things you ought to know, and I want to say just one wee thing to you now. Be keeping your heart and your life clean and sweet for the lady-bird. If you do that, you'll be a man.' Old boy, the lady-bird hasn't come along yet. I don't know when she will, but I've tried so hard ever since to be ready for her, and all my ideals of what a home ought to be like I've gotten

from your father and the way he treats your mother. Jimmie, it's beautiful to me, and I've often wondered if you realized it, and if you were being worthy of their dreams for you."

Side by side they made their way down to the little camp in the valley, each lad lost in his own thoughts. Mr. Wentwerp had a little lunch ready for them, and they ate heartily. All felt a subtle change, and at last laughed to break the spell. From that hour perfect comradeship reigned in the little party.

The next morning, after a delightful evening by the fire, James and his father went out for a last good fish together, for on the morrow they were to break camp. For hours they sat side by side on a great rock, with a marvelous panorama spread out before them. Is it surprising that there was little real fishing? Mr. Wentwerp's fly lay

hopelessly tangled in a near-by willow, while James' line lay high and dry on a protruding shelf of rock. Yet neither knew it, and it mattered little where fish-hooks were, for father and son were at last coming into their own.

"We both have made many mistakes, my lad," he was saying thoughtfully, a peaceful smile on his face. "We have both been missing the way of real life in unconscious selfishness. But tomorrow—ah! little Mother will be so glad, for we can tell her that we have at last discovered each other, and out in this wonderful country we have found 'Our Father' and are coming back to live the Jesus way together."

His eyes were shining, and his voice quivered gently in spite of himself, but the hand that grasped the extended hand of the lad was steady as steel.

"O Dad, I'm glad we came!" said

the boy, and then both, a bit abashed, slowly began to reel in their forgotten lines.

"Not biting this morning," commented Mr. Wentwerp, a sly little smile on his happy face.

"Not up in the bushes anyway," laughed James. "Let's go home!"